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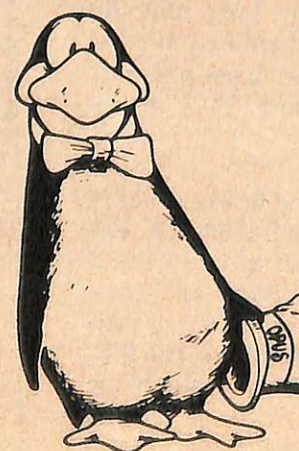
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The Courier-Journal - The Louisville Times



The Flood

Continued

chairs and tables that crumbled when they were touched.

A house bearing the address 311 Cabel St. had been swept from its foundation and was found resting on a car. The roofs of cars submerged on Second Street bore a perfect herringbone pattern of dents left by the blades of outboard motors. Everywhere the river had played its cruel jokes.

"The narrow hardwood strips were lying everywhere," wrote Virginia Emrich about a friend's West End home. "Dilapidated tables, chairs, lamps, mirrors, kitchen utensils and putrid food were strewn in confusion in the living room. On the bathroom floor was a ten-inch fish."

After the water was pumped out there remained the unbelievable mud, and after the mud was scraped and washed away there remained the stench of the river. The smell remained for months, and when it was gone there were still the nightmares and memories.



The receding waters revealed one of the flood's casualties, a mule, caught on a utility pole.

Memories are all that's left of the prehistoric Ohio; flood walls completed in 1955 ensure that it will not come again.

"It's going to take Louisville a century to recover from this," wrote Mary Clowes after the water began to recede.

But it didn't. Not at all. The Committee on Morale coined a gung-ho slogan — CHICAGO DID IT! SAN FRANCISCO DID IT! NOW WATCH LOUISVILLE!

The brave words may or may not have helped, but the city did rebuild. By May, Churchill Downs was ready for the Derby and signs of the flood's destruction were harder to find. In fact, many felt the city looked better and brighter, its gardens more fertile, after the baptism by flood. Whether it really was cleaner or just seemed that way, it's impossible to say; but the spring of 1937 was greeted with a special intensity.

"Never before have the gardens in Louisville been more beautiful than this year," wrote Emilie Yunker, the supervisor of nature study and gardening for the public schools.

"There was something enormously stimulating with the return of the daffodils. . . . Daffodils — almost every species — 15 acres near the Ohio River under water for days — never had healthier or larger blooms." □

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